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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 KATHMANDU 002347

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR SA/INS BAYER;NSC FOR MILLARD;USAID/ANE/SA
FOR BUNDY

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PINS](#) [PTER](#) [PGOV](#) [MARR](#) [NP](#)

SUBJECT: NEPAL: REPORT FROM MAOIST HEARTLAND

¶11. (U) A journalist working for one of Nepal's most respected English language newspapers has recently visited Rukum, a district in west central Nepal considered part of the heartland of the Maoist insurgency. His published report offers some insights into the autocratic nature of Maoist governance and the villagers' responses in the absence of Nepali Government administration. Highlights of the report are the following quotes:

¶12. (U) While the district headquarters at Khalanga and former battle zones like Khara show strong army presence, most villages are under the sway of the Maoists. The Nepali Government and representatives of the national political parties are conspicuous in their absence. Once in a while, an army helicopter hovers overhead, but otherwise there is no sign of the Government.

¶13. (U) The rebels are so confident the security forces cannot invade their strongholds that they have left the villages under the control of their "village peoples' government." Low-ranking Maoist rebels run day-to-day activities in Rukum. They say the Maoist militia and district level leaders have gone to "special areas" and won't divulge any other details. Reports from other sources indicate the leaders are gathering in the Terai.

¶14. (U) According to one Maoist spokesman, the revolutionary government plans to develop the villages in accordance with a public directive issued by a district leader, who threatens "severe punishment" if his orders are not obeyed. Locals have to construct toilets in their homes or face the possibility of being taken to a Maoist labour camp, even though they have tried to explain that their more immediate priority is safe drinking water.

¶15. (U) In one village, the rebels have commandeered about 300 ropanis of land belonging to one landlord. A dozen or so convicts charged with murder and facing the Maoist brand of justice are forced to work the fields, while the former landlord has fled to the city of Nepalganj.

¶16. (U) It is now mandatory for people to take permission from Maoist authorities for weddings, divorces, and even to travel to the district headquarters. After they tied the knot two months ago, two 15-year-old newlyweds were forcibly separated and sent to their respective homes by the rebels because they were underage. The couple was also forced to pay Rs 3,000 each. The Maoists declare that they are strictly against child marriage and polygamy.

¶17. (U) Maoist laws change from one village to the next because Maoist government is irregularly administered without any rationale. "Our laws change according to the times. It is not necessary that the law of one village should be the same as that of another," explains a leader.

¶18. (U) Areas of Rukum under Maoist control are officially dry. But there is moonshine available and some villagers will secretly take a swig or two when they are sure no one is looking.

¶19. (U) Maoists require those who want to leave a village to get permission first. A Maoist "visa" is necessary for travel to Khalanga, the district headquarters. People visiting relatives for the holidays recently needed special Maoist permits. All travellers face intense interrogations by both Maoist sentries as well as security forces anywhere they go.

¶10. (U) In village after village, there are only older people and children. There are no young men and women, no teenagers. A whole generation has gone missing in the villages of the midwest; they have moved to the cities or left the country for safety and in search of work.

¶11. (U) Most stayed away from their homes in the district even during the Dasai holidays out of fear of extortion and harassment. The shortage of able-bodied men and women has meant that farm production has dwindled, and there are looming food shortages.

¶12. (U) A teacher says that, "The children are forced to take on adult chores and now have little time for school." So the

schools have shut and it is the elderly who are left to fend for themselves and take care of their grandchildren.

13. (U) The locals have discovered that people's rule is not what they had been promised. They mutter about how their real needs have gone unattended while the rebels are comfortable because they have no real opposition. "Of course we are scared that they may take action against us if we complain," whispers one local. "We just do what they tell us to do." They are weary of the compulsory activities that the Maoists force on villagers, and some admit secretly that they are sick of obeying orders and being threatened. But they are too scared to say these things openly for fear of reprisal.

14. (U) Everyone is worried that, with the collapse of the last ceasefire, an outbreak of fierce fighting similar to what took place in Bhawang in neighboring Rolpa last month could erupt in their district. Their overwhelming desire is for peace, so their loved ones can return home, and they can get on with their lives.

MALINOWSKI